

The Croghan House
Stanton Hts., Pittsburgh Pa.
Allegheny Co.

HABS No. 8-8

HABS
PA
2-PITBU
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 8

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

Historic American Buildings Survey
Charles M. Stotz, District Officer
815 Bessemer Bldg., Pittsburgh Pa.

HABS

PA.

2. PITSB

3.

CROGHAN HOUSE
or Schenley House or Picnic Place
Stanton Heights
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

Owner: Not given.

Date of Erection: 1817; additions in 1840's.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Good.

Number of Stories: Three.

Materials of Construction: Stone and brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

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The Croghan House
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Stanton Heights
Pittsburgh...Pa
Allegheny County.
HABS NO 808

HISTORICAL DATA

The recorded history of this structure deals mainly with the romance surrounding the elopement of Croghan's daughter with Captain Schenley, and it has been very difficult to get any authoritative data dealing directly with the building.

Although Schenley had nothing to do with the building of the house and only lived in it a year or so, it has always been known as the "Schenley House", or, as Croghan named it, "Picnic Place."

A brief account of the family history follows. The material was gotten from the books and newspaper clippings contained in the Carnegie Library's "Pennsylvania Room" and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

The property was originally owned by General O'Hara who came to Fort Pitt in 1773. He held many offices of importance under Washington among which was Quartermaster General of the United States Army. His daughter, Mary, married William Croghan, Jr., who was born in Kentucky, son of Major William Croghan who came to Fort Pitt with Colonel John Neville in 1782.

William Croghan, Jr. after his marriage with Mary O'Hara in 1821, made his permanent home in Pittsburgh. Shortly after the birth of their only child, Mary Elizabeth, Mrs. Croghan died. It seems that about this time, Croghan was building a home on Black Horse Hill (now Stanton Heights) which he called "Picnic House" and this we assume to be the rear or stone portion containing the Ball Room. This would place the date of it at about 1825.

He was passionately devoted to his daughter. With the idea of giving her the best education available, he sent her at the age of 17 to Miss McLeod's school on Staten Island. Here she met Captain Edward W. H. Schenley, 50 years old and a widower for the second time, and fell in love with him. Her father refused to consent to her marriage with an English army officer. They thereupon eloped and were married in 1842, immediately leaving for England.

The news of his daughter's elopement caused her father to faint and brought on an illness which nearly took his life. A year after the marriage he went to London, where he found his daughter to be happy and he became somewhat reconciled. He found them in poor circumstances. As he had inherited vast real estate holdings from his wife's father, Croghan was extremely wealthy. His first act was to buy his son-in-law a handsome London house. After a visit of a year he obtained a promise from them to come to America and to make their home with him in Pittsburgh.

Croghan then returned to Pittsburgh, and immediately set to work to build a mansion which would be a replica of their London home. It is said that the drawings for it were prepared in England. He soon completed the house, which we assume to be the brick or front portion and at that time continued the two-story porch around one side of the original or stone portion. This would make the date of the second building about 1845.

The Schenley's did not comply with their promise until about five or six years after Croghan's return. They then came to America (about 1848) with three children and a retinue of servants. They stayed only a year or two, when due to the persuasion of Schenley who found life in the American back country too tedious in spite of the elaborate living facilities, stables and social life furnished, they returned to England.

Croghan died one year later, on September 22 1850, it is said, of a broken heart.

Descendants of the servants who came from England have occupied the building until this day. Otherwise it has been left untenanted although all of the furnishings remained intact until February 1931, when most of them were sold off.

Approved *Charles M. Stotz*
Charles M. Stotz, District Officer

Above material collected by District Officer.

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.

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DESCRIPTIVE DATA

The structure as it now stands has been subjected to almost no alteration since its erection. The brick piers which support the porch were supplied in modern times and replace the wooden Doric columns which originally occupied that position as may be seen from early photographs of the house.

The outbuildings, barn, smoke-house, stables, etc., are still standing and in fairly good state of preservation.

The original planting has disappeared, partly due to the fact that the building is now surrounded on three sides by a golf course. Newspaper articles refer to a thorn and lilac hedge which originally bordered the entrance drive. There was also a conservatory behind the stone wing which has totally disappeared.

The dates of the two buildings, as will be seen by examination of the historical data, are extremely hard to fix with any certainty.

The stone wing is unquestionably earlier and has a distinctly higher quality of design. The columns in the ball-room are of wood and the elaborately carved capitals are of wood. One of the column shafts is of cast iron. We assume that it was later installed to replace a wood one. The windows which serve as entrances to the three bed rooms are very ingeniously constructed. The lower sash slides into the wall to the side and reveals a door which swings in a normal manner. The chandelier is a little out of scale with the room as is also the plaster ceiling ornament, but is a beautiful thing in itself.

If this stone wing was built first as a self-contained unit, it seems rather curious that it should consist ~~primarily~~ of ~~rooms~~ a Ball Room and Oval Reception Room with three rather inaccessible bed-rooms and servants' quarters below. From its name "Picnic House" it would almost seem to have been intended for entertainment alone.

When the brick portion was added, the connection was effected in a way which produces one long axis through the two buildings as will be seen by referring to the plan. The new two story porch was carried down one side of the stone wing and the stone wall fronting on the porch was plastered on both ground and upper floors.

Approved *Charles M. Stotz*
Charles M. Stotz, Dist. Officer

Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.